

How Baseball is Enjoyed by the Blind

Radio has historically been significant to both people who are visually impaired, and to the sport of baseball. As far back as 1929, the American Foundation for the Blind held radio drives, and distributed 3,500 radios that year alone. People who were visually impaired could, through their radio, become part of significant shared experiences with thousands of other people. As Helen Keller said of radio, “All the world will crowd into the humble dwelling of our blind friends. The silent room will hum with live interests” (What Radio Means to the Blind.) Often times, one of those shared experiences was a baseball game. More than any other sport, Baseball translates well to radio. Its measured pace allows a listener to concentrate on every play. Baseball’s action and layout are well organized and easy to visualize. The sport has its own vocabulary, allowing for concise yet descriptive narration. And baseball arguably has the most skilled announcers of any sport – even having their own place in the National Baseball Hall of Fame (Walker.) Radio announcers can be so entertaining and descriptive that some people, like blind Rockies fans Peggy and Mark LoRusso, even listen to the radio while attending a game. The radio announcers are like friends and heroes to the LoRussos, and are the eyes that allow them to see a baseball game (Hochman.) The 100-year presence that baseball has maintained on the radio has also created generations of

nostalgia and tradition on the airwaves. Those sounds of the game never change, even when technologies do (Walker.)

Attending a game in-person is, of course, one of the most exhilarating things a baseball fan can do. In a 1934 article in *Baseball Magazine*, a blind Detroit Tigers fan named A.L. Floyd describes a game well enough to place the reader there. He can hear the yells of the vendors and the noises in the grand stand as he enters. He knows the players, sometimes personally, and knows their histories so well he can almost predict their plays. Reactions from the fans mix with the sounds of the field to give timing to the game. The umpire's calls determine the pitcher's skill, while a crack or thud signifies a hit or a strike. Even the sound of the grass could give Floyd cues as to when a grounder was hit. Jeers from the crowd describe a player's reputation, while cheers or moans explain their performance. All of these sounds combine to illustrate a game every bit as thrilling and tense to Floyd as it was to the rest of the crowd (Floyd.) Almost 50 years later, famous blind musician Jose Feliciano described a similar experience in his article "Playing Baseball Lights My Fire." Growing up in New York, he recalled that he could even tell the speed of the ball by the sound of the pitch itself. He was also especially excited to hear the jubilation of the crowd when he was in Philadelphia for game 6 of the 1980 World Series (Feliciano.)

While discussing his experience as a fan, Jose Feliciano also brought up the importance of baseball announcers in his life. Although some

announcers were terrible, he said, he loved announcers who gave an in-depth analysis, like Phil Rizzuto. With baseball announcers holding such an important place in the lives of fans who are visually impaired, it might not be surprising that some of those fans have become announcers themselves. Blind since birth, Bryce Weiler has announced games for the Peoria Chiefs, University of Illinois at Chicago, and has taken part in some St. Louis Cardinals radio broadcasts. In addition to announcing games, Weiler has a master's degree in sports management, and served as an accessibility consultant for the Baltimore Orioles (Keilman.) Enrique Oliu, who has also been blind for his entire life, has been the Spanish language radio announcer for the Tampa Bay Rays since their inaugural game in 1998. He has been with the team for 20 seasons, and was honored to accompany the team to the 2008 World Series (Holtzman.)

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